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COUNTRY Poland

REPORT

SUBJECT Changes in Polish Public Opinion Since  
October 1956 and Their Relevance for  
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**INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT**

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COUNTRY: Poland

DATE: 15 October 1957

SUBJECT: Changes in Polish Public Opinion Since October 1956  
and Their Relevance for Western Broadcasters

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Changes in Polish Public Opinion Since October 1956

1. [ ] there has been a marked change in public opinion since October 1956, but that the change has been not so much in kind as in degree. More people have stronger convictions. Sympathies and antipathies are more widespread and intense.

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Attitudes Toward the Polish Government

2. The vast majority expected a dramatic and fundamental change with the accession to power of Gomulka, who, after his years of imprisonment, was expected to be a determined enemy of Soviet oppression and a dedicated champion of the Polish people. Personal freedom, national independence and sovereignty, economic well being, and all sorts of individual and collective benefits were expected to flow from the achievements of the "revolution". These expectations were reinforced by the press in numerous exultant articles giving the impression that all objectives had been accomplished and that henceforth everything would be different.

[ ] this press tone was adopted cynically and intentionally to quiet the populace. [ ] the relatively few others who "think more broadly", the politically more sophisticated, recognized that due to its geographic position and the polarization of world power, Poland could not hope to break away from the Soviet Union, withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, or establish effective neutrality and independence. However, they did hope, and some expected, that although little would change vis-a-vis the USSR, internal policy and action would be independent of Moscow, and democratization would replace the grip of fear and oppression.

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3. [ ] a great letdown has taken place, that the results of the October effort have been so small by comparison with the expectations of even the most realistic and cautious Poles as to cause bitter disillusionment and disappointment throughout the population. Criticism has been freer and the UB has been restrained, if possibly only for the moment, but little or nothing else has changed. [ ] the freedom with which people speak to each other in criticism and complaint, and considered that although it does break the former isolation of each individual, the government is consciously permitting and utilizing this relative freedom because "it's easier to be patient and work when you can gripe". [ ] for the vast majority the primary and basic touchstone by which betterment is judged is the standard of living in terms of food, and to a lesser extent, clothing and shelter. [ ] the general

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experience of the population has been a steady decline in their standard of living ever since October, a decline which continues to this day.

4. There has developed a realization that the USSR would not permit the political changes, either in foreign relations or internally, which were hoped for in October. "After all, before the January elections, the VOA itself told us that no other politics were possible under the circumstances, and to vote for Gomulka." Some 80 to 90 percent of the people realized this, but the supremely overriding fact is that from day to day, month to month, there is no improvement. [redacted] no improvement is to be expected unless the whole system is changed. [redacted] as to how many others share this opinion, but reiterated that the vast majority were not interested in systems or comparative government. What they wanted was a higher standard of living, and any government which did not provide it was a failure in their eyes, call it socialism, communism, or anything else.

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#### Attitudes Toward Socialism and Communism

5. Only a relatively small group of Poles have concerned themselves with Communism and Socialism and for them the aftermath of October has been an accelerated and intensified process of disillusionment. "No one has the vision of Communism any more. Members of the Party no longer believe in it, nor is there much belief that socialism will build anything great. How could they believe? [redacted] the people returning to Poland after years in the Soviet Union, that after 40 years of building socialism the standard of living and the cultural and intellectual development there are terribly low. They are even lower than under what the Soviets describe as 'rotten capitalism'. In Russia, it hasn't made anybody's life better and easier and in Poland it hasn't". [redacted] the position of Soviet and Polish government leaders false when they hold Marxism-Leninism as a sacred and immutable law. "Every government and system of government must change and adapt to changing times and conditions. To hold rigidly to a 40-year-old idea is wrong." [redacted] how many others blame these governments for conservatism, [redacted] or had concluded, [redacted] that the leaders' only interest is in the perpetuation and expansion to world proportions of personal power. [redacted] is not alone in these thoughts, and is inclined to believe that this is the opinion of the majority of Poles concerning the Soviet leaders at least.
6. The hope for a free and independent Poland has not been extinguished. It has been indefinitely postponed. What most of the people hope for now is a change of some sort in Russian which will permit a greater degree of independence and consequent internal improvements in Poland. There is also belief that latitude does exist for Gomulka to maneuver both in his relations with the USSR and internally. There is hope that he and the government will move gradually and carefully in the direction of increased national independence and internal democracy. The constant fear is lest some mild or violent action release a Soviet onslaught similar to that in Hungary. [redacted] there had been no change within the USSR which people felt promised any benefits to Poland. [redacted] the fall of Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich as anything but a power struggle leading toward reestablishment of one-man dictatorship, by no means a hopeful sign from the Polish point of view.

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Attitude Toward the United States

7. There is more sympathy and friendliness for the US and its views and actions throughout Poland now than ever before. There is a more acute awareness of the contrast between the brutality, belligerency, and deceitfulness of the USSR on one hand, and the patient, pacific attitude and general decency of the US on the other. In particular, the US is given credit for successful resolution of the recent Middle East crisis which most Poles feared would lead to major war and in which many considered the Soviet role inflammatory. [redacted] the anti-American propaganda effort over the years has been an almost total failure and actually served to some extent to discredit the propagandists.

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Attitudes Toward Western Broadcasts

8. The greatly increased tendency to disbelieve official statements, and the recent widespread personal involvement in political activity, have led to a greater eagerness to listen to Western radio broadcasts. They are almost universally considered the only source of reliable information. [redacted] Not only do people listen openly, but there is extensive discussion of the broadcasts and their content with little or no restraint. [redacted] 70 to 80 percent of the adult population either listen or are told about the programs on an almost daily basis. [redacted] loud complaints voiced on a crowded streetcar of the jamming engaged in by neighboring Bloc countries which interferes with reception in Poland. [redacted] Most urban listeners make the same distinctions while the more backward people in the countryside probably don't think about it, and lump all "Western" broadcasts together.
9. [redacted] most listeners shared his preference [redacted] over the "tendentious" material sent out of RFE and Radio Liberation's Voice of Free Poland. [redacted] resented any tendency to treat Poland, its people, or even its leading figures with an "ironical tone" or to make fun of them. News about events in Poland, and commentaries particularly, were listened to with great care, not only as of most interest, but also because they offered an opportunity to check the veracity of Western broadcasts against personal experience. [redacted]
10. In general, [redacted] when discussing the broadcasts was one of personal involvement showing attachment to them, reliance on them, and anxiety that they live up to his high expectations and serve their vital role in Poland. [redacted] sent letters three times after October 1956 [redacted] requesting more Polish news. [redacted] Western radio has a great following and great influence in Poland today. [redacted] a fact from talking with them that most Party members listen (though less openly) and thinks their disillusionment and scepticism are such that they are indistinguishable from the rest of the population in their attitudes.
11. [redacted] the following suggestions for improving [redacted] broadcasts to Poland:
- a. More news about developments in Soviet Russia both because changes are hoped for and to counter the Soviets' propaganda image of themselves.

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- b. More information about the political and economic processes of democracy; how things are done [ ] and in other democratic nations, to provide more freedom and more responsiveness to popular desires and needs; descriptions of the work of labor unions; how nominations for election are made, details of how America's high standard of living was achieved and how it is maintained. 25X1
- c. A few programs for the army aimed at the officers who listen at home each evening after the day's duty. The themes [ ] suggested were: 25X1
- (1) The Soviet attempt to dominate and change the Polish Army.
  - (2) Domination of the Warsaw Pact by the Soviets. "We are all supposed to be equal, but tell them who holds whom by the scruff of the neck".
  - (3) Inferior and obsolete Soviet armament supplied to the Polish Army.
  - (4) "The Soviets claim to have the best weapons in the world and deride Western weapons as weak and inferior. You should counter this propaganda."
  - (5) "The Soviet Army will shoot down their own Russian people. Explain how a democratic army works, what the soldiers and officers do; and most important, how to keep an army democratic and loyal to its own people so our army will never shoot at Poles."
  - (6) [ ] Polish military friendship and past assistance. 25X1
  - (7) Biographies of leading Polish military figures so that the Communist politicians can be distinguished from the true professional Polish officer corps.

Miscellaneous Observations

12. [ ] political broadcasts by refugees and escapees served no useful purpose partly because these people were soon out of touch with their country and its mood, and partly because they were unknown and somewhat suspect. [ ] such persons could best be utilized to describe their life in the West six months or a year or two after their escape. 25X1
13. [ ] "blackbook" broadcasts and had no particular interest in them, but felt they should be accurate in every detail or they would do more harm than good. 25X1
14. [ ] jazz is the only kind of music worth transmitting and should be continued due to the keen interest and enthusiasm of Polish youth. There is no need to worry about giving the impression of cultural poverty; the Polish people know better. 25X1
15. Western broadcasts in secondary languages, especially in Russian, are fairly widely heard.
16. Local Polish broadcasts are improved over what was available before October but offer no competition to Western broadcasts as they cannot cover the same subject matter.

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